# Public Consultation Paper:
# Ancient Forest/Chun Toh Whud U Jud

October 2015

BRITISH COLUMBIA

## Overview

The Province is working with the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation and the Caledonia Ramblers Hiking Society, other community stakeholders and the public to protect the unique ecosystems of the Ancient Forest/Chun Toh Whud U Jud.

The forest covers more than 12,000 hectares of largely unlogged inland temperate rainforest, and contains stands of giant red cedars, some more than 1,000 years old, as well as rare plants and lichens. The forest is 120 kilometres east of Prince George next to Slim Creek Provincial Park.

The partners are working together to ensure the Ancient Forest, called Chun Toh Whud U Jud in the Lheidli dialect, is preserved and, in the long term, established as an official protected area under provincial legislation.

The Province plans to set aside up to 12,000 hectares as a specially designated area designed to protect the Ancient Forest's unique ecosystem, and is currently seeking public input into the plan to protect this critical site. Key questions include:

- How much of the up to 12,000-hectare area should be protected?
- What activities should be allowed on the site?
- What is the public's role in ensuring the long-term conservation of the Ancient Forest?
- Should the Province continue to support efforts to have the Ancient Forest designated as an UNESCO World Heritage site?

Your input will inform decisions for formally protecting the Ancient Forest and Driscoll Ridge area, and government will announce the plan in 2016.

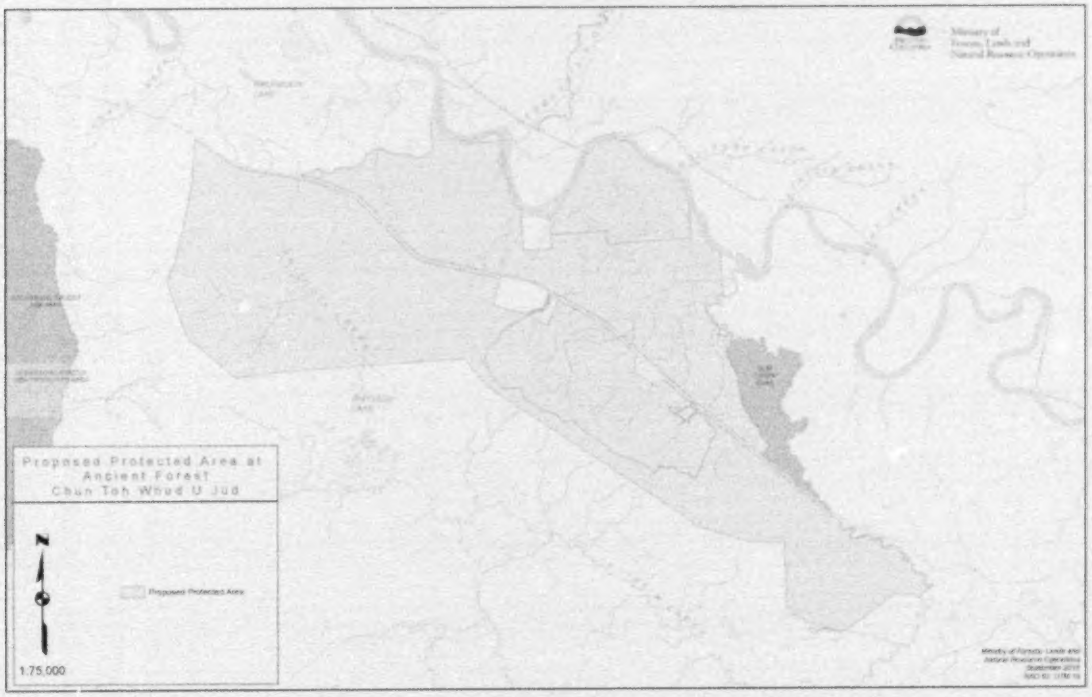
## The Ancient Forest Today

While coastal temperate rainforests occur elsewhere including Chile, New Zealand, and Norway, the Ancient Forest is part of the Interior Cedar Hemlock Forest, the only known and described inland temperate rainforest on Earth. The climatic and historic conditions in the forest have allowed for the development of high species diversity, including canopy lichens, and the area contains the best concentration of rare, old, inland cedar-dominated ecosystems in B.C.

In fact, the area is so unique that a 2012 discussion paper by researchers from the University of Northern B.C. called for the forest to be designated a UNESCO World Heritage Sites, like SGang Gwaay on Haida Gwaii and the Canadian Rocky Mountain parks in B.C. and Alberta.

Under an existing regional land and resource management plan, almost one-third of the forest – some 4,600 hectares -- is designated as old growth management areas. This ensures that no management decisions are made without careful considering the biodiversity needs of the area. While the land use plan will not be reopened, an increase in the size of the protected area is consistent with the original intent of the plan.

Once government has set up the new protected area, the partners will develop a management plan for the area, to ensure the long-term the Ancient Forest and preservation and protected for generations to come.



## Key Issues

### First Nations

- The Chun Toh Whud U Jud is within the traditional territory of the Lheidli T'enneh and is an important part of the First Nation's cultural heritage.
- The Lheidli T'enneh First Nation are partners in the public engagement process and have been supportive of the initiative to protect the area.
- The Province and the Lheidli T'enneh will work together to develop a long-term management plan for the site.

### Ecological Values

- The Ancient Forest is globally unique: it is part of the only known and described inland temperate rainforest in the world.
- These forests are globally significant due to very infrequent fire return intervals and long site continuity that provide for rare habitats, species establishment, and very long-lived cedar trees – some in excess of 1,000 years old.
- The area contains high biological diversity including diversity of lichens. Eight new species of lichens known to science have been found in similar forest types to those of the proposed protected area with up to 90 additional lichen species awaiting identification and classification.

### Resource Industry

- There is one guide outfitter operating in the area, along with one range tenure and five trap lines. These activities can be allowed to continue within a protected area; the consultation will help define the future of these activities in the area.
- There are limited resource interests in the area. There has been very little commercial forestry activity because of limited markets available for cedar and extremely high operating costs. Removing the proposed protected area from the timber harvesting land base will have less than a 1% impact on the volume of timber available in the Prince George Timber Supply Area. This will not affect any existing jobs or mills.
- There are three gravel reserves held by the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure. The proposed protected would consolidate the gravel reserves.
- There are no other mineral extraction or mining activities in the area.
- No compensation to any resource interest will be paid to establish this protected area.

**Recreational Activities**

- The Ancient Forest Interpretive Site and Trails and Driscoll Ridge Trail are designated recreation trails in the area.
- The Caledonia Ramblers Hiking Club Society manages and maintains these trails.
- Some 15,000 visitors hike the Ancient Forest trails every year, and visitors contribute to $217,000 to the local economy.
- The proposed protected area is not expected to impact existing recreational activities, while the protected area designation could help increase both visitor traffic to the site and associated regional economic activity.

## Protective Designation

British Columbia's protected areas system provides for the protection and maintenance of important natural and cultural values and outstanding outdoor recreation opportunities. Protected areas contain some of the best representative elements of British Columbia's natural and cultural heritage. They include ecological reserves, provincial parks, conservancies, recreation areas, and protected areas established under the *Environment and Land Use Act*.

While the Province has numerous legislative options available when it comes to protecting the Ancient Forest, the most likely scenario would be designation as a "Class A" park.

Class A parks are lands dedicated to the preservation of their natural environments for the inspiration, use and enjoyment of the public. Development in a Class A park is limited to that which is necessary to maintain the park's recreational values. Certain low-impact activities that were taking place at the time the park is established – things like nature walks, grazing, hay cutting – may be allowed to continue under careful supervision.

Class A parks can be established under the *Park Act* or the *Protected Areas of British Columbia Act*. A management plan will be prepared for the Ancient Forest that will set out a long-term vision and management objectives for the area and strategies to achieve those objectives.

**Potential UNESCO Designation**

The Province supports the call to have Ancient Forest designated a UN World Heritage Site. The process for nominating World Heritage Sites in Canada is coordinated by the federal government.

Canada currently has nine Natural World Heritage Sites and eight Cultural World Heritage Sites. There are three designated UNESCO sites in British Columbia:

1. SGang Gwaay, a cultural UNESCO World Heritage Site within Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve, National Marine Conservation Area Reserve & Haida Heritage Site
2. Yoho National Park, Kootenay National Park, Mount Robson Provincial Park, Hamber Provincial Park, and Mount Assiniboine Provincial Park (which are all within the larger Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks UNESCO World Heritage Site).
3. Tatshenshini-Alsek Provincial Park, (which is within the larger Kluane/Wrangell-St. Elias/Glacier Bay/Tatshenshin-Alsek UNESCO World Heritage Site, that extends into Alaska and Yukon).

To be considered by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site, the area must first have adequate protection – which is part of the reason for the current review. The proposed park must meet some of UNESCO's selection criteria, which includes that it:

- Contains superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance.
- Demonstrates outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals.
- Contains important and significant natural habitats for the conservation of biological diversity, including habitats containing threatened species.

Once established as a park, the site must then be endorsed by Canada and formally nominated by the Federal government. Such nomination requires that the area has the following:

- protection through legislation and policies;
- an up-to-date and approved management plan;
- characteristics that clearly demonstrate "outstanding universal value" in comparison with other similar sites around the world;
- First Nation, stakeholder, and community support for the nomination.

**Help protect the Ancient Forest!**

The Province is holding a series of regional meetings to get feedback on the plan to preserve the unique ecosystems of the Ancient Forest. The meetings will take place at:

- The Lheidli T'enneh band office on October 8, 5:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m.
- The Robson Valley Community Centre in McBride on October 13, from 5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.
- The Dome Creek Community Hall on October 14, from 4:30 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.
- The Prince George Civic Centre on October 15, from 7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Following these meetings, a summary of the comments received, along with recommended management direction will be posted to the website so that you can see what people have said and comment on the final recommendations that will be provided to government.

The Province is also accepting email comments on the plan; send your feedback to ancientforest@gov.bc.ca.

You are invited to visit the Ancient Forest Trail and explore the area firsthand. It is located on the south side of Highway 16 near Slim Creek and provides an opportunity to view enormous ancient cedar trees within B.C.'s inland rainforest. The trailhead, located 113 km east of Prince George (6.6 km west of the Slim Creek rest area). The trail is an easy to moderate hike marked with interpretative signage and includes boardwalk sections suitable for wheelchairs and mobility devices.